

What Is Moxibustion?

Moxibustion is the use of herbal incense burned close to the skin over an acupoint to treat and prevent diseases by applying heat.

Moxibustion, or “Moxa” is known to help to regulate Qi, expel cold, expel dampness, stop bleeding, warm the spleen & stomach, and remove stagnation, It is used by women to warm the uterus, regulate menstruation and ease the fetus during pregnancy. It can be used in conjunction with acupuncture, or separately.

Moxa materials are generally composed of what is called “Moxa Wool”, a derivative of a species of artemesia, Unlike some other materials, moxa wool burns at a tolerable, controllable rate. The herb, known in Chinese as *Ai Ye*, enters the channels to disperse cold and alleviate pain.

How To Use Moxa

Moxa is most widely used in two forms, Moxa Cones (made manually from moxa wool), and moxa sticks (pre-fabricated, cigar shaped). The moxa is ignited over a flame (like an incense stick) and placed over an acupoint or area on the body.

Moxa Cones-

Moxa cones are shaped by hand by rolling moxa wool between the fingers or on a hard surface. The cone size can vary, but should generally be no larger than a centimeter in height by a centimeter in width.

There are two ways of burning moxa cones over the acupoint, directly and indirectly. -Direct application (sometimes referred to as “scarring application”) refers to a moxa cone being set directly on the skin, often with an adhesion aid like onion juice or garlic juice, and then ignited. The moxa is allowed to burn close to the patients skin and can become quite hot before snuffed out.

-Indirect application (sometimes referred to as “non-scalding” application) refers to a medical barrier being placed between the moxa cone and the skin. Medical barriers vary based on patient needs, in some cases an aerated slice of ginger, or garlic, or a mound of salt can be used to protect the patients skin. When the moxa is burned 1/2 to 2/3 of the length of the cone it can be replaced and re-ignited.

Moxa Sticks-

Moxa sticks are often considered much more convenient to use than moxa cones, but are equally effective in most cases. The moxa stick is also ignited over a flame and administered over the acupoint in two methods, the “mild warm” method, and the “sparrow-pecking method”.

-Mild Warm Method of application refers to the lighted moxa stick being applied over the acupoint and being burned continuously for 5-10 min until the application area becomes red and hot.

-Sparrow Pecking Method of application refers to the lighted moxa stick being held above the skin at the acupoint and dropped rapidly and repeatedly or “pecked” at the skin gently, and carefully not to burn the skin. The moxa can also be moved in a circular motion over the skin in a similar repeated manner.

USING MOXA at HOME

There are two types of moxa to use at home. Both are in stick form and require igniting the stick. One is charcoal stick form which burns slowly and creates little smoke. the other is the loose leaf stick form which burns faster and creates a lot of smoke.

SET UP

- To use either form of moxa at home you will first need to prepare a few items.
- You will need to have an ignition source for your moxa stick, a burning candle is a safe, convenient (and constantly lit) source.
- You will need to create a “snuffer” to extinguish your moxa stick after use. You can easily make one by folding aluminum foil into a cigar shape slightly wider than your moxa stick, and twisting and pinching one end of the foil cigar shut.
- You will also need to prepare an ash receptacle for the moxa. A small ceramic or metal bowl or cup will work well for this. As your moxa burns, ashes will form, it is important to relieve the moxa stick of its ashes to protect the skin. It is also important that you do NOT tap the moxa stick to flick the ashes off the stick, as this can result in the loosening of embers and can potentially burn the skin, instead, you should roll or rub the ashes along the rim of the receptacle until they are free from the moxa stick.
- Burning moxa can create smoke, its best to perform moxibustion in a space with an exhaust fan (like a bathroom) or a well ventilated space.

PROCEDURE

- Light the moxa stick by holding one end over a flame, and roll the stick between your fingers to allow it to light evenly on all sides.
- Once the moxa is lit, you may remove it from the flame. Blowing softly on the stick will encourage accelerated burning of the embers (much like incense).
- Now that the moxa is burning, you may hold it over your skin at the point suggested for you by your acupuncturist. Hold the stick an inch above your suggested point, ember side toward the skin, and move the moxa in a regular, gentle, sweeping motion over the area, monitoring the skin temperature, and “ashing” the stick as needed throughout the procedure.
- When the area is hot, the skin may become red, this is an appropriate time to move to other points on the body or extinguish the moxa.
- To extinguish the moxa place the stick in the aluminum foil snuffer ember side toward the pinched, or closed end and place it in the ash receptacle to allow it to cool completely.